cotton substitute improves women's lives
Disposable feminine sanitary pads story

With World War I raging in Europe and provoking cotton shortages, Kimberly-Clark executives realized that the Cellucotton developed by their researchers could be used as a cotton substitute for a variety of purposes. Ernst Mahler, head of the research, technical and engineering department, traveled to Washington D.C. to convince the U.S. surgeon general that its new product Cellucotton would be an ideal substitute for surgical cotton dressing in treating war wounds. K-C researchers had discovered that Cellucotton, creped cellulose wadding found on a fact-finding mission to Europe and later refined by K-C researchers, was five times more absorbent than cotton and, when mass produced, could cost half as much.

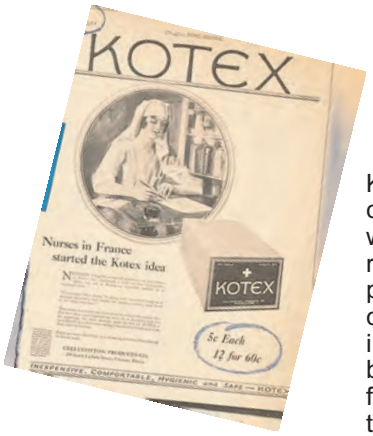
Nurses Discover New Use for Bandages

Mahler was successful in his presentation. After the U.S. entered the war in 1917, K-C produced wadding for surgical dressing for the government and the Red Cross at the rate of 380 to 500 feet per minute. Red Cross nurses were using the new material as sanitary pads during their menstrual periods. Until then, "American women wore a diaper of bird's-eye or outing flannel, which they were obliged to wash and reuse," according to the book The Curse, A Cultural History of Menstruation.

The end of the war in 1918 brought about a temporary suspension of K-C's wadding business because its principal customers - the army and the Red Cross - no longer had a need for the product. K-C repurchased the government's war-surplus Cellucotton and had to figure out what to do with it. After learning of how the nurses created a new use for the product, K-C executives and scientists believed that they could develop a viable commercial consumer product for women everywhere.

K-C Develops Sanitary Napkin

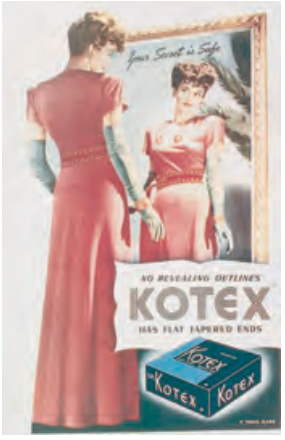
After two years of intensive study, experimentation and market testing, the K-C team created a sanitary napkin made from Cellucotton and fine gauze, and in 1920, in a little wooden shed in Neenah, Wis., female employees began turning out the product by hand. Kotex (for "cotton texture") was introduced to the public in October 1920.



Kotex pads were K-C's first consumer product, and they were nothing short of revolutionary. Made from 40 plies of absorbent creped cellulose wadding shaped in a rectangle and wrapped by hand in gauze, those first napkins were bulky by today's standard, but they performed very well. For 60 cents, customers received 12 napkins packaged in a "hospital blue" box.

Breaking Down Barriers

Now it was time to tell the world about Kotex. Society's prim attitudes at the time regarding the subject of menstruation created a barrier that K-C executives had to break down to be successful. One publication after another refused to accept advertising for Kotex pads until, finally, after much discussion on the appropriateness of copy, the Ladies Home Journal agreed to run an ad. It featured a picture of a sophisticated woman and was headlined, "In the wardrobe of Her Royal Daintiness." It was accompanied by copy describing the product's background and benefits.



Still, many drug and department stores refused to stock Kotex pads. Sales were disappointing and K-C executives had come to an impasse - should K-C drop Kotex pads and write off its investment or keep trying? The leaders of K-C decided it was worth the risk to continue to manufacture and sell the product.

The Kotex brand, of course, eventually became one of the greatest success stories in the history of American consumer products. Through massive education efforts and innovative advertising campaigns, K-C confronted and broke down society's preconceptions and stereotypes regarding menstruation.

Evolving to Meet Women's Needs

K-C continues to deliver new and improved feminine hygiene products that make women's lives easier through the application of technological advances, the opinions of medical experts and key insights gained from our customers, shoppers and users. To learn more about Kotex products, visit www.kotex.com.

Kotex®